IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Original) A method for automated settlement of a monetary dispute comprising the steps of:

registering a dispute on a web-based automated settlement system, including entering information concerning the parties and the dispute, and entering communication addresses of the parties;

generating a secure authorization number unique to the particular dispute and communicating that number to the parties via their respective communication addresses;

storing the information concerning the parties and the dispute in a data storage location associated with the secure authorization number;

displaying a settlement contract obligating the parties to the disclosure of binding offers or binding settlement at a particular dollar amount upon the occurrence of pre-determined negotiation conditions;

terminating the automated settlement process if one of the parties declines to execute the settlement contract;

displaying a split and settle option to a first party in which the monetary settlement is reached at the mid-point dollar amount between non-confidential offers of the parties prior to registering the dispute on the web-based automated settlement system;

signifying election of the split and settle option by a first party including entry of the non-confidential offers of the parties;

storing the non-confidential offers in the data storage location associated with the secure authorization number;

notifying the second party of the registration of the dispute on the web-based automated settlement system and of the secure authorization number;

upon the second party accessing the web-based settlement system using the secure authorization number, displaying the split and settle option to the second party together with the non-confidential offers; and

notifying the parties that settlement has been reached at the mid-point dollar amount if the second party signifies election of the split and settle option.

2. (Original) The method for automated settlement of a monetary dispute of claim 1, wherein the communication addresses are e-mail addresses of the parties and the notifying steps of the method include sending an e-mail message.

3. (Original) The method for automated settlement of a monetary dispute of claim 1, further comprising:

entering a proximity test value by a first party, the proximity test value indicative of a negotiation condition relative to a dollar amount offer of the first party;

entering a dollar amount offer by the first party and storing such dollar amount offer in the memory associated with the secure authorization number;

calculating a disclosure dollar amount by applying the proximity test value to the dollar amount offer;

upon a second party accessing the web-based settlement system using the secure authorization number, displaying a request to enter a counter-offer, while maintaining the offer of the first party confidential;

upon entry of a counter-offer dollar amount by the second party, comparing the counter-offer dollar amount to the disclosure dollar amount;

and if the counter-offer dollar amount is not within the disclosure dollar amount, terminating the settlement process while maintaining the offer and counter-offer confidential;

otherwise, if the counter-offer dollar amount is within the disclosure dollar amount, notifying the parties of the offer and counter-offer dollar amounts;

wherein the settlement contract makes the offer and counter-offer binding on the respective party so that settlement is reached if one party accepts the other party's offer dollar amount.

4. (Original) A method for automated settlement of a monetary dispute comprising the steps of:

registering a dispute on a web-based automated settlement system, including entering information concerning the parties and the dispute, and entering communication addresses of the parties;

generating a secure authorization number unique to the particular dispute and communicating that number to the parties via their respective communication addresses. storing the information concerning the parties and the dispute in a data storage location associated with the secure authorization number;

displaying a settlement contract obligating the parties to the disclosure of binding offers upon the occurrence of pre-determined negotiation conditions;

terminating the automated settlement process if one of the parties declines to execute the settlement contract;

entering a proximity test value by a first party, the proximity test value indicative of a negotiation condition relative to a dollar amount offer of the first party;

entering a dollar amount offer by the first party and storing such dollar amount offer in the memory associated with the secure authorization number;

calculating a disclosure dollar amount by applying the proximity test value to the dollar amount offer;

notifying a second party of the registration of the dispute on the web-based automated settlement system and of the secure authorization number;

upon a second party accessing the web-based settlement system using the secure authorization number, displaying a request to enter a counter-offer, while maintaining the offer of the first party confidential;

upon entry of a counter-offer dollar amount by the second party, comparing the counter-offer dollar amount to the disclosure dollar amount; and

if the counter-offer dollar amount is not within the disclosure dollar amount, terminating the settlement process while maintaining the offer and counter-offer confidential;

otherwise, if the counter-offer dollar amount is within the disclosure dollar amount, notifying the parties of the offer and counter-offer dollar amounts;

wherein the settlement contract makes the offer and counter-offer binding on the respective party so that settlement is reached if one party accepts the other party's offer dollar amount.

5. (Original) The method for automated settlement of a monetary dispute of claim 4, wherein the communication addresses are e-mail addresses of the parties and the notifying steps of the method include sending an e-mail message.